

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Lower ground-level ozone standard to affect South Carolina**

COLUMBIA - With tighter standards for ground-level ozone announced by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, state air quality experts forecast these new ozone standards will give way to long-term benefits as the state's air quality improves even more, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control reported today.

"South Carolina's air quality is among the cleanest in the nation," said Myra Reece, chief of DHEC Bureau of Air Quality. "The EPA's tightening of the eight-hour ground-level ozone standard means the air will get even cleaner. However, some counties in the state have monitors that indicate ground-level ozone concentrations above the new standard and could face being declared in nonattainment if efforts to reduce ground-level ozone within the next few years are not successful."

Reece said the EPA released a proposal last year to strengthen the National Ambient Air Quality Standard for ground-level ozone. The standard finalized today reflects new scientific evidence about ozone and its effects on people's health.

With the EPA's announcement of 0.075 parts per million (ppm) for the primary ozone standard, seven counties had at least one monitor with average readings above the new standard in 2004-2006. The counties include Abbeville, Aiken, Florence, Pickens, Richland, Spartanburg and York. The EPA also announced a new secondary standard for ozone to improve protection for plants, trees and crops during the growing season. The secondary standard is based on scientific evidence indicating exposure to low levels of ozone can damage vegetation.

"It is important to remember that the air is getting cleaner as a result of increasingly stringent federal and state regulations," Reece said. "DHEC is prepared to meet these new challenges through continuing efforts with its stakeholders and partners for improving air quality for the citizens of our state."

Reece said when the EPA revises air quality standards, each state must recommend to the EPA the boundaries of areas not in compliance with the new standard. The states must then develop and submit to the EPA and submit a plan outlining how those areas will meet the new standard. DHEC has been preparing for the process and will seek input from all stakeholders. DHEC expects the boundary recommendation will be due to the EPA in March 2009. States with areas designated as nonattainment in 2010 will be required within the next three years to revise their State Implementation Plan with the needed control measures to ensure that the standards are met and maintained.

"The most important concern a nonattainment designation raises is from a public health standpoint so DHEC, as our state's public health and environmental agency, will work diligently with local governments and stakeholders to improve air quality and achieve the new standard as quickly as possible," she said.

Reece said there are economic consequences as a result of a nonattainment designation, including lengthy stringent permitting requirements for industry and additional transportation planning requirements in the nonattainment areas.

"Strong commitments by local stakeholders to implement strategies earlier than federally required in the past have already proved successful through the 8-hour Ozone Early Action Compact process," said Reece. "Local stakeholders were given the flexibility to implement programs geared toward reducing oxides of nitrogen emissions and those programs reduce ozone."

"We need to continue to build on the momentum DHEC has gained in partnership with its local stakeholders for ground-level ozone, particulate matter and greenhouse gases," Reece said. "South Carolina is fortunate

to have such commitment from its stakeholders. Their efforts to reach these 'cleaner air sooner' goals are recognized by EPA and DHEC."

Reece said maps have been prepared indicating ozone concentrations based on the 2004 - 2006 and the 2005 - 2007 data. DHEC expects final designations to be based on ozone data from 2007 - 2009. The map can be found on DHEC's Web site at:

<http://www.dhec.sc.gov/environment/baq/scozone.aspx?Page=naaqso>

Reece said since cars and trucks are a significant source of pollution that causes ozone, residents can help limit the formation of ground-level ozone by:

- Driving less and combining trips
- Carpooling
- Staying in at lunch instead of driving to lunch
- Avoiding excessive vehicle idling
- Using SMARTRIDE or other mass transit where available. To see if you have SMARTRIDE in your area, link to: <http://www.scdot.org/getting/smartride/smartride.shtml>.

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